

The Athenian Mercury.

TUESDAY, March 5. 1695

Quest. 1.

A Person that has been a very good liver in all respects, that has nothing to accuse himself of, except general failings, has nevertheless sometimes very great temptations to doubt of his salvation, which makes him very uneasy; and tho naturally of a cheerful temper, the thoughts thereof so disturb him, that he is at such times very melancholy: Several friends have discouer'd him about it, some of which tell him there can be no assurance in this life, tho others say there may, and think he has a great deal of reason to hope he may one day be in that Number. These divided Judgments together with his own doubts very much afflict him, wherefore if you'll give him your thoughts upon this query, whether there can be any certainty of salvation in this life; he hopes he may find great satisfaction from them, and shall always think himself infinitely obliged to you.

Answ. These Melancholy Notions very oft in good persons proceed from the ill temperament of the body, and where it is so the cause must first be removed before the unhappy effect can cease. But for those who have the perfect use of their reason, and have lived pious lives, they may be absolutely assured, by the promises of God, that if they prelev're in the duties of Christianity, they shall obtain salvation. And that 'tis only in this estate that they must continue to secure their eternal happiness; in which they may remain so stedfast by the assistance of God's grace, that there is no temptation whatever but they shall be able to resist, either by that grace they have already received, or that which God is ready to grant them whensoever they shall sincerely and fervently desire it of him.

Quest. 2. Is it the Custom of remote Countries to testifie their sorrow for the loss of Friends, by wearing of different Apparel? And if it is, do they put on Black, as we do in these parts, or any other Colour? And what Reason can be given for our making choice of that Colour, preferrable to all others?

Answ. Black is the fittest Emblem of that Sorrow and Grief the Mind is supposed to be clouded with; and as Death is the Privation of Life, and Black a Privation of Light, 'tis very probable this Colour has been chosen to denote Sadness, upon that account. And we often find, although it is better discern'd by the Senses, than exprest by Reason, That it is not only apt to put us in mind of past Grievs, but also to excite New. This the melancholy person is very sensible of; and most, if not all, would be so, had not the Commonnels of such dresses, so accustom'd us to 'em, as in some measure to diminish this natural effect. Tho

'tis not improbable but one reason why the mind becomes sad at the sight of black, may be because when it appears in the body it is generally a sign of death, because it is produced by the mortification and extinction of the spirits. A living body being full of vivacity and brightness, whereas a dead one is gloomy and dismal, for at the same moment the soul leaves the body, a dark shade seems as it were to be drawn over it; so that this colour is not only a proper representation of grief and sadness, but also of death which is the cause of it; and has upon the account of mourning been preferred by most people throughout Europe: Yet several Nations have express'd their grief for the Loss of the dead by wearing other Colours, and gave as they thought as good reasons for it; the Syrians, Capadocians, and Armenians use sky-colour to denote the place they wish the dead to be in, viz. in the Heavens. The Egyptians yellow, or Fillemot, to shew that as herbs being faded become yellow, so death is the end of humane hope. And the Ethiopians grey, because it resembles the colour of the Earth, which receives the dead. And indeed almost all mankind, excepting some Barbarous people, have Lamented the death of their friends and shew'd their sadness by External Mourning.

Quest. 3. I know it is the common opinion that women mourn more for the death of their Husbands than men do for that of their wives, which perhaps may not be altogether false; nor shall I enquire whether it proceeds from the small Number of good wives, or inconstancy and love of change in the men, being neither a friend to the one nor the other only so far as I find amiable qualities in them; yet I believe I have at present an instance of a husband whose grief you can hardly equal, in any woman, either for its violence, or duration, such fits being generally worn off by diversions, business or a new face; and the most seemingly desperate of 'em has been observed to be cured by a little time. But this has lasted for three or four years already, and seems not to be diminished. The story is of a Gentleman in Kent, of which for brevity's sake I can only give you these few instances: As soon as his Lady dyed he left her not till some of his friends forc'd him to bury her, ever since which time he has spent an hour or two every day in mourning over her grave, his Countenance is now always sad, tho he was before of a cheerful temper, nor will he admit of the thoughts of another wife, or any thing that might divert his grief. I only desire to know if any History furnisheth us with a woman's Lamenting the Loss of her husband to such a degree, who continued as constant in the expressions of it.

Answ. We'll be more complaisant than to question the truth of the story, tho we wish you had been so kind not only to have named the coun-

country but town too, for it certainly proceeds from some contagion in the Air, that so we might have forewarn'd every honest husband of coming near it. But perhaps this Gentleman grieves for the whole Sex, that the little sign we see of it in others might be excused, therefore we won't disturb him; only we having met with a case that won't give way to his we think it will not be amiss to shew that the women share folly, as well as good qualities with us. If we should bring the examples of the Indian wives who burn'd themselves, or were buried alive with their husbands, it might be objected, there were sudden motions of grief, which would have worn off if they had but taken breath; But we have an account of a Princess who was next heir to *Castile* and *Aragon*, that must be granted to equal, if not exceed this; since she not only lamented the death of her husband, but also refused the Crown because he cou'd not enjoy it with her, (she dying just before it fell to her) nor woud by any means hear of the proposal, but entered into mourning chambers, whither she permitted but few to come, and none that woud not entertain her with discourses of him, in which retirement she continued till she dyed, altho' it was many years.

Quest. 4. Whether the Oaths of Lovers and Gamblers signify any thing, or not?

Ans^r. Very seldom to those they make them to, because they are scarcely ever performed; but in respect to themselves, as obligatory as the Oaths of other Persons, and must as certainly be accounted for.

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